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GC(75) 12th  
Conclusions

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CABINET

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CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet  
held at 10 Downing Street on  
THURSDAY 13 MARCH 1975  
at 10.30 am

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PRESENT

The Rt Hon Harold Wilson MP  
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Edward Short MP  
Lord President of the Council  
(Items 1-4)

The Rt Hon James Callaghan MP  
Secretary of State for Foreign and  
Commonwealth Affairs

The Rt Hon Lord Elwyn-Jones  
Lord Chancellor

The Rt Hon Roy Jenkins MP  
Secretary of State for the Home Department

The Rt Hon Denis Healey MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Anthony Crosland MP  
Secretary of State for the Environment

The Rt Hon Michael Foot MP  
Secretary of State for Employment

The Rt Hon Eric Varley MP  
Secretary of State for Energy

The Rt Hon Shirley Williams MP  
Secretary of State for Prices and  
Consumer Protection

The Rt Hon Barbara Castle MP  
Secretary of State for Social Services

The Rt Hon Anthony Wedgwood Benn MP  
Secretary of State for Industry

The Rt Hon Peter Shore MP  
Secretary of State for Trade

The Rt Hon Roy Mason MP  
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Reginald Prentice MP  
Secretary of State for Education and Science

The Rt Hon William Ross MP  
Secretary of State for Scotland

The Rt Hon John Morris QC MP  
Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon Merlyn Rees MP  
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The Rt Hon Fred Peart MP  
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries  
and Food

SECRET

The Rt Hon Harold Lever MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

The Rt Hon Lord Shepherd  
Lord Privy Seal

The Rt Hon Robert Mellish MP  
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury  
(Items 1-4)

The Rt Hon John Silkin MP  
Minister for Planning and Local  
Government

SECRETARIAT

Sir John Hunt  
Mr P D Nairne (Item 4)  
Mr P Benner (Items 1-3 and 5)  
Mr J A Hamilton (Items 6 and 7)  
Mr E J G Smith (Items 1-4)  
Mr J R Jameson (Item 4)  
Mr R L Baxter (Items 6 and 7)  
Mr R G S Johnston (Item 5)

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1. THE PRIME MINISTER recalled that it had been agreed that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and he should present to the Cabinet on Monday 17 March a report of the results of the renegotiation of our terms of membership of the European Economic Community (EEC); and that they should give a similar account that evening to the back-bench members of the Parliamentary Labour Party. He had now made arrangements to meet early that evening all members of the Government other than members of the Cabinet, who otherwise would not have an opportunity to be given an account of the results of the renegotiation and to express views on them. The Cabinet would then at a further meeting the following day decide what recommendation to make to the British people.

In discussion it was suggested that since the views of most members of the Cabinet were now public knowledge they should be free to express differing opinions forthwith. On the other hand it was emphasised that the Cabinet needed to reach their decision after examination of the factual results of renegotiation and hearing the views of their supporters. This could not be before Tuesday 18 March and until then there was no collective decision to differ from.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up a brief discussion, said that it would be necessary for the Cabinet, after considering a factual presentation of the results of renegotiation, to reach a formal decision on their recommendation to the British people. He would aim to announce the Government's decision on Tuesday 18 March or Wednesday 19 March and individual members of the Cabinet would then be free to dissent publicly. But there would then be some three months before the referendum, during which time the Government's normal work must be carried on. He would circulate guidelines under which the agreement to differ would operate, including arrangements to cover the position of those dissenting from the Government's decision when dealing with matters related to EEC issues in Parliament, in the normal processes of Ministerial policy making, and when attending meetings of the EEC Council of Ministers.

The Cabinet -

Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion.